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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the current state of parental involvement in site-based management (SBM) councils. It defines SBM as a formal alteration of the governance structure and as a form of decentralization that identifies the school as the primary unit of improvement. To assess SBM councils, surveys were mailed to 600 principals representing urban, suburban, and rural public schools. The surveys focused on governance structures and specifically addressed principals' perceptions of the degree of power given to parents. Results taken from 191 usable surveys indicate that 60.7 percent of principals reported parental representation on SBM councils. Of the 116 principals who reported parental involvement, 38 worked in urban settings, 30 in suburban settings, and 48 in rural settings. The number of parents on SBM councils varied: 22 percent of principals indicated that parents made up the majority of SBM members, whereas 78 percent of principals reported that parents were in the minority or were in equal numbers to school personnel. Findings show that SBM councils are able to involve parents in decisions regarding instruction and budgets. However, 87 percent of the principals indicated that parental influence is limited either by the principal having the final say or by the SBM council having a majority of certified staff members. (Contains 45 references.) (RJM)

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Parental Involvement in School Governance: Emergence of a New Model?

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Introduction

Public schools in the United States have been under pressure to restructure; many restructuring efforts call for increases in parental involvement (Goodlad, 1985). The push for parental involvement in decision making has led to much debate regarding who should run the school (Ogawa, 1996). Some believe that parents should be given the opportunity to participate in decisions regarding the curriculum, schedule, budget, and other matters related to what goes on in school. Others believe the governance of schools should be left to professional educators. The conflict between those who argue for parental input in the decision making process and those who advocate professional control of the schools is a "major dilemma for policy makers" who, according to McDonnel (1991), "must balance these two values in the best interest of the student" (p. 249).

The purpose of this study was to examine the current state of parental involvement in site based management (SBM) councils within public schools in the United States. SBM has been defined by Malen, Ogawa and Kranz (1990) as a "formal alteration of the governance structure, as a form of decentralization that identifies the school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as a primary means through which improvements might be stimulated and sustained" (p. 290).

Power as it related to SBM has been identified as control over curriculum, budget, and personnel (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). Research also has indicated that control over curriculum and instruction is central to SBM (David, 1989; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). Corbett (1991) further described the types of power exercised in schools and other organizations.

Legitimized power refers to influence exerted by one in a position of authority. Endorsed power refers to the acceptance of legitimized power by subordinates in the organization.

Kolb and Putnam (1992), stated that any "definition of conflict must be fluid in any situation " (p. 312) and must take into the account the contextual circumstances of the dispute. Conflict may be said to exist, according to Kolb and Putnam (1992), "when there are real or perceived differences that arise in specific organizational circumstances and that engender emotion as a consequence" (p. 312). Conflict may result in confrontation, in which the two parties publicly discuss their differences. Often times, however, conflict is engendered by avoidance behaviors including withdrawal from the group and tolerating the situation without public comment. According to Kolb and Putnam (1992), avoidance and tolerance rarely resolve the dispute and in time, the dispute surfaces again in different ways.

According to Pondy (1967), conflict in organizations can often be classified into three basic types: conflict regarding the distribution of scarce resources, conflict regarding differences in group or individual perceptions of organizational goals, and conflict resulting from the introduction of new members into the decision making process. In the latter example, the conflict revolves around the issue of autonomy. Members in the decision making group may resist the efforts of new players to become a part of the decision making process. This type of conflict has to do with autonomy or protecting one's "turf".

Conflict is a natural outcome of changes in the power structure (Sarason, 1995). Sergiovanni (1984) used open systems theory to describe how conflict is generated. According to Sergiovanni (1984), schools, as open systems, receive a variety of diverse inputs from the external environment. The diverse inputs, combined with disagreement regarding outputs, lead

to conflict. Schein (1992), reinforced this viewpoint by arguing that "infusion of outsiders inevitably brings various cultural assumptions into conflict, raising discomfort and anxiety levels" (p. 325). According to Hersey and Blanchard (1988), conflict is common within collaborative organizations because "individuals trust each other and are frank and open in sharing information and ideas" (p. 355).

Historical Perspective

Many of the reform efforts call for an increase in parental involvement in the schools and in the decision making process used by schools (Goodlad, 1985; Sarason, 1995; US Department of Education, 1994; Wong, 1995). The push for increased parental involvement in the decision making process has not been without conflict. This conflict regarding who should run the schools has been present since to beginning of public education in the United States (Cremin, 1965). The public role in governance has always been, according to Cremin, "to set policy, decide direction and fix support: we speak of public control, not merely public sponsorship or influence. On the other hand, there is the prerogative of the teaching profession to govern its own work" (p. 90).

One of the foundations of the common school movement in the United States was that of parental and community control. From the beginning of the movement in the early 19th century parents and other community members gathered for district meetings to select teachers, discuss the curriculum, set the school calendar, and determine the length of the school day (Cubberly, 1934). Parents and community members also handled administrative duties. School trustees were elected to run the administrative affairs of the school. The trustees managed the day to day activities of the school. Parents were able to influence school activities by attending trustee

meeting and voicing their opinions and concerns (Cubberly, 1934).

Schools grew through the 19th century. As the schools grew, administrators were hired to handle the daily affairs of the school (Berger, 1991; Johnson, 1988; Wong, 1994). At first school administrators handled mundane tasks such as record keeping, rather than making decisions regarding the curriculum or employment of staff. Management of the school was often left to the school board alone. Parents were able to continue to exert influence over the school by attending school board meetings.

Two significant developments in the late 19th century contributed to a decline in parental control over school affairs: the reduction in the size of a school board, and the growing "professionalism" of administrators. In the late 1800's many boards had 20 members or more. School boards were criticized as being too easily influenced by ward party bosses. The ward party bosses controlled school board elections and were able to use their influence to award jobs and contracts as political favors (Zigler, Tucker & Wilson, 1977). Citizens called for reform. The result was legislation that reduced the size of a board from upwards of 20 members to no more than 7 members.

As boards changed, so did school administration. Smaller boards did not have the time to run the day-to-day affairs of the school. More power was given to school administrators (Berger, 1991; Gliedman, 1991). In addition, administrative training programs became more specialized. The professionally trained administrator was given a broader role to play in the management of the school. Once again the result was a lessening in amount of influence that the average citizen was able to exert over school matters.

In the 20th century a third factor contributed to the decline of parental control over school matters: consolidation (Berger, 1991; Wirt & Kirst, 1989; Wong, 1995). Consolidation effectively reduced the opportunity for lay participation in the schools. Wirt and Kirst (1989) found that in 1952 there were 67,355 public school districts in the United States. In 1989, 16,000 school districts existed.

The combination of growing professionalism by teachers and administrators, the reduction in the size of school boards, and the consolidation of small school districts had greatly reduced the amount of influence that parents were able to exert on schools. This reduction led to dissatisfaction and calls for reform. Many of these reforms called for greater parental control in school governance.

After publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983, many schools undertook reform efforts. One of the characteristics of many of these reform efforts was decentralization of control. Site-based management is built upon the notion of decentralization. The terms decentralization, site-based management, and school-based management are used to describe a building level approach to school management.

SBM is not new to public schools. In the early 1960s, SBM became popular (David, 1989; White, 1989). Since the 1960's, the adoption of SBM by school districts has spread across the United States (Clune & White, 1988; Malen, 1994; Ornstein, 1989).

Two popular school reform models that surfaced since the publication of A Nation at Risk were the School Development Program and Accelerated Schools. Both models involved parents on site-based decision making councils. The School Development Program was developed by James Comer, a professor at Yale (Comer, 1980, 1986; Comer & Haynes, 1991;

King, 1994). The model according to Comer and Haynes (1991), is designed to focus on the social interactions of students, staff, and parents at the elementary level. School decisions are made through the use of a governance council. Parents serve as members of this council. The council uses consensus as a method to reach decisions.

The Accelerated Schools (AS) model was created by Hank Levin at Stanford. The AS model, according to Hopfenberg, et al. (1993), was designed to bring at-risk students up to grade level by the end of the sixth grade. The AS program also uses a site-based approach to decision making. Consensus is the decision making model used by the AS governance council (King, 1994).

Recent reform efforts have emphasized the role of parents in site-based decision making. These reforms and the involvement of parents in the reform efforts can be framed through the use of open systems theory. Open systems theory was derived from systems theory used by biologists to explain ecological systems. Morgan described the systems approach as one that "builds on the principle that organizations, like organisms, are 'open' to their environment and must achieve the appropriate relationship within that environment to survive" (p. 45).

According to open systems theory, organizations that are open to their environment can survive and prosper for two reasons: they can import energy from the outside environment; they are also able to readily sense changes in the outside environment. Organizations need input from the environment in order to survive (Morgan, 1986; Scott, 1981). The organization that shuts the door to outside influences will eventually become stagnant, unresponsive, and "dies" because its services are no longer needed.

As organizations, school must be able to perceive changes in the larger environment. Openness to the environment, according to Scott (1981), allows the organization to become more diverse. The school that is open is able to sense change in the larger environment and also has a more varied response pattern due to its increased diversity. The open school can better adjust curricula, teaching strategies, and programs in order to better meet the needs of the student. The closed school, not having sensed the change in the environment, will remain the same. Students will suffer the consequences of this closure

Parental involvement in school governance is one method for schools to become open to the larger environment. Andrews (1987) provided some insight to the use of an open systems approach to school governance. According to Andrews, educational systems are a part of a larger system. Any decision made in the educational system has an impact on the ecology of the school and, in time, on the ecology of the larger system. The ecological approach encourages educators to take an open, interdependent view of the relationship of the school to the larger community

Approaches to Site-Based Management

Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) identified three basic forms of site-based management. Each is different in terms of who gains control over decision-making.

The "principal control" model is one form of site-based management. This form of managements shifts power from the central office to the individual school, with the principal as the primary decision-maker. The principal is encouraged, but not required, to set up school councils; if a council is established, the principal usually controls council membership. All power rests with the principal. Schools in Dade County, Florida, Rochester, New York, Salt

Lake City, Utah, and Albuquerque, New Mexico use this form of site-based management (Wohlstetter & Odden 1992; Wong, 1994).

The second type of site-based management is called administrative decentralization. In this model, power to make decisions is shifted from the central office to the building level with teachers retaining most of the decision making. The administrative model uses school councils as decision-making units. Teachers, parents and the building principal serve on the councils, which are structured to have a majority of teachers. Schools in Los Angeles use the administrative decentralization approach. Councils are made up of six to sixteen members, depending on the size of the school. Each council is formed so at least half of the seats on the council are reserved for teaching staff (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992).

Power is shifted to parents in the community control model. School councils are also used as decision-making units in this model. Parents, teachers, and the principal serve as council members. The difference in terms of power lies in the number of seats held by parents. The community control model reserves most of the seats on the school council for parents. Chicago City Schools uses community control model at each of their public schools. Each Chicago SBM council has 11 members. Six of the members are parents; parents are elected to council by community members within the school's catchment area. Two community members, two teachers and the principal also serve on the council (Hess, 1991a; 1991b; Mirel, 1993)

It is difficult to determine the number of schools operating under each model. Often schools do not report the governance structure of their site based councils. State departments of education do not gather information regarding the type of governance structure used for SBM, except in instances where the state has mandated a particular type of site-based management.

Methodology

Participants included principals from public schools in the United States. Participants for the study were randomly selected from three settings (rural, suburban, and rural). Two-hundred principals within each setting were mailed a survey. Through the survey, data were collected on demographics, and the variables of power, conflict, and minority representation on SBM councils. Of the 600 surveys mailed, 194 were returned and 191 were useable in the analysis.

The surveys focused on the governance structure used at the school. The items within the survey sought the principals' perceptions of the degree of power devolved to parents and the amount of conflict present on school SBM councils. Principal's perceptions of the degree of representation of minority parents on SBM councils was the third area of focus on the survey.

The survey instrument contained 30 statements, with 10 statements focusing on each of the following areas: power held by parents, conflict, and representation of minority parents on council. Participants responded to each statement by choosing one of the following response options: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

The values for each area, power held by parents, conflict, and minority representation were totaled. The highest possible score for each area was 40 points; the lowest possible score for any area was 10 points.

The three types of SBM described by Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) were addressed in the first section of the survey. On question 2, participants were asked if the principal had the final say in council decisions. Participants who marked "strongly agree" or "agree" on question 2 were categorized as SBM councils using the principal control form. Remaining participants

who marked "strongly agree" or "agree" on question 3 were categorized as SBM councils following the administrative decentralization form of SBM. On question 3, participants were asked if certified staff made up a majority of council membership. Participants still remaining who marked "strongly agree" or "agree" on question 4 were categorized as community control schools. Question 4 asked participants if parents made up the majority of council membership. Participants who marked "strongly agree" or "agree" on questions 2 and 3 or 2 and 4 were classified as principal control schools since, according to Wohlstetter and Odden (1992), the determining characteristic of the principal control model is use of the principal as the chief decision maker.

Participants who marked "strongly agree" or "agree" to both questions 3 and 4 were considered invalid and the surveys were not used in data analysis. The statement in question 3 indicated that certified staff make up a majority on the council; the statement in question 4 indicated that parents make up a majority on council. Additional information garnered from the study included the demographics of the school. Demographic information included the grade level of the students served, number of students served, number of minority students within the school, number of minority staff members holding certified positions within the school, percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch, and number of minority parents serving on the governance structure.

Participating schools were asked to provide any written documentation regarding the operation of their SBM structure. Participants were also asked to respond to open-ended questions in the surveys including questions regarding the type of decision making process used by councils. Text analysis was used on the written responses and on any written documentation

provided by participants.

The text analysis followed content analysis strategies described by Borg and Gall (1983). The analysis focused on words and phrases dealing with conflict resolution, minority representation, and parental involvement in decision-making. Ethnograph, a computer text analysis program systematically identified references to parental involvement, minority representation, and conflict resolution. Phrases were then sorted and regrouped in each category.

Results

One-hundred-sixteen principals (60.7%) indicated that SBM councils involving parents existed in their buildings. Seventy-five (39.3%) reported SBM councils involving parents did not exist in their building. Surveys reporting no parental involvement on SBM councils were removed. Of the 116 principals who reported parental involvement on school SBM councils, 38 worked in urban settings, 30 in suburban settings, and 48 in rural settings.

The number of parents on SBM councils varied. One-hundred-nine principals completed the section of the survey pertaining to council membership. Twenty-four principals (22.0%) indicated that parents made up the majority of SBM members in their schools. Parents were in the minority or were in equal numbers in the remaining 85 schools (78.0%) that had SBM councils involving parents. Seven of the 116 surveys that indicated the existence of an SBM council with parents did not complete this section of the questionnaire.

Participating schools were classified using the SBM types identified by Wohlstetter and Odden(1992). Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) identified three types of SBM councils: parent control, administrative decentralization, and community control. Schools were classified into

the three categories according to responses to survey questions dealing with who had the final say on council questions and who held a majority of council seats.

One-hundred-sixteen participating principals completed the sections focusing on the type of SBM councils existing in their schools; 5 of the 116 surveys were considered invalid because of conflicting responses to the three survey questions targeting SBM type. Analysis of the remaining 111 surveys indicated that 51 of the principals (45.9%) operate under the principal control model. In these schools, the principal serves as the chief decision maker and has final authority on council decisions. An additional 36 respondents (32.4%) operate under the administrative decentralization model. In the administrative decentralization model, power is shifted away from the central office to the school building with certified staff retaining much of the decision making power. The principal does not have the final say in the administrative decentralization model. Data analysis showed that only 9 of 111 schools (8.1%) follow the community control model, with parents and community members retaining most of the decision making power.

Of the remaining schools, 15 (13.5%) followed a model of site-based management not identified by Wohlstetter and Odden (1992). Principals from these school indicated that neither parents nor certified staff members held a majority on council and that the principals did not have the final say on council decisions. In 10 of these 15 schools, equal numbers of parents and certified staff members served on council. In the remaining five schools, data from the survey indicated that although a majority of staff served on councils, the councils were designed to have equal numbers of parents and staff members. Difficulty in recruiting parents led to unequal representation on councils designed to have equal numbers of parents and staff.

Principals were also asked to respond to three statements regarding the areas that SBM councils had decision making power. These areas were curriculum, budget, and personnel. According to Wohlstetter and Odden (1992), power involves control over budget, curriculum, and personnel. The data indicated that parents were involved in decisions regarding curriculum and instruction. One-hundred-fourteen (98.3%) of 116 principals with parental involvement on school SBM councils indicated the council made decisions over curriculum and instruction. SBM councils with parents also made decisions regarding the budget of the school; 93 (80.1%) of the 116 respondents indicated that their SBM council was able to make decisions involving the school budget. Fewer SBM councils made decisions involving school personnel- 39 of 166 principals (33.7%) reported that parents, through participation on SBM councils, had input in decision regarding school personnel.

Three hypotheses guided the study. The hypotheses were: a) a statistically significant relationship exists between the degree of power devolved to parents and the amount of conflict present on SBM councils; b) a statistically significant relationship exists between the involvement of minority parents on council and the amount of conflict present on SBM councils; and c) a significant difference exists between the amount of power devolved to parents in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The correlational approach was used to compare the results of three subsections of the survey. The second, third, and fourth subsection of the survey focused on parental power, conflict, and minority representation. Questions 1 through 10 focused on power. Questions 11 through 20 were designed to provide information regarding the presence of conflict on school SBM councils. The participation of minority parents on school SBM councils was determined by questions 21 through 30. The variables of "power", "conflict",

and "minority" were created by adding the responses in the respective subsections.

Responses to the survey reveal a minimum score of 16, indicating little power devolved to parents, and a maximum score of 39 on the power section of the survey, indicating a high degree of power devolved to parents. The mean for the power construct is 28.25 with a standard deviation of 3.94. The minimum score for the conflict construct is 13, indicating low levels of conflict. The maximum score on the returned surveys for the conflict construct is 34, indicating a high level of conflict. The mean for conflict is 22.69. The standard deviation for conflict is 3.23. Responses to the survey reveal a minimum score on the minority construct of 21 and a maximum score if 40. The score of 21 on the minority construct indicates a low to moderate degree of minority involvement on school SBM councils. A score of 40 indicates a high degree of minority involvement. The maximum possible score on this section of the survey is 40. The mean for minority is 27.97. The standard deviation for the minority section of the survey is 4.39.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the internal consistency reliability for the power, conflict and minority sections. The Cronbach coefficient for the raw variables of the power section is 0.60. The internal consistency reliability for the raw variables for the conflict section is 0.62. The Cronbach's alpha for the raw variables of the minority section is 0.75. The results of the internal consistency reliability analysis are within the acceptable range.

The first hypothesis was that a statistically significant relationship exists between the amount of conflict present on SBM councils and the amount of power devolved to parents serving on council. A Pearson product correlation was used to test the relationship between the constructs of power (the sum of questions 1 through 10) and conflict (the sum of questions 11

through 20). The Pearson product correlation for the constructs of power and conflict as measured by the survey was not statistically significant.

The second hypothesis was that a statistically significant relationship exists between the degree of involvement of minority parents on council and the amount of conflict present. The range, mean and standard deviation for conflict are listed above. The Pearson product correlation for the relationship between the degree of minority involvement and conflict was not statistically significant. The third hypothesis was that a statistically significant difference exits among the three levels of school setting (urban, suburban and rural) and the dependent variable, power. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze this hypothesis. The relationship between power and setting was not significant.

Text Analysis

The last section of the survey asked three open ended questions and gave participants the opportunity to make general comments. Responses to the three questions and additional comments were analyzed using a text analysis program. Ethnograph was the text analysis program used. Ethnograph allows the researcher to code text; the program records coded text and can be used to retrieve text according to specified codings.. In addition, the program will provide the frequency of each coding and the number of lines coded in each specified code. The text analysis focused on responses in three general categories: conflict resolution, parental involvement, and minority representation.

Decision Making and Conflict Resolution

The text analysis reveals that consensus is the most common decision making process used. Thirty three of the 96 principals (34.4%) who completed the open ended questions

indicate that consensus is the only process used. When consensus cannot be reached, the item is often tabled. Fifteen principals (15.6%) suggest that when consensus cannot be reached the item is tabled. Of these 15 principals, 13 use consensus and other methods to reach councils decisions; two of the 15 were among the respondents that solely used consensus as a means of reaching council decisions. Four principals (4.2%) indicate that consensus is the primary decision making process but voting is used when consensus cannot be reached. Two additional principals (2.1%) indicate that they make the final decision when consensus cannot be reached. Voting is used as the primary decision making process by 16 of the principals (16.7%) responding to the open ended questions. Compromise was mentioned by some principals in describing strategies that are employed when consensus cannot be reached. Four principals (4.2%) indicate that adjustments are made to issues when consensus cannot be reached.

Another strategy that was employed in the decision making process was professional override of SBM decisions. Twenty-eight principals (29.1%) suggested that professional educators, usually the principal, had the power to override council decisions. Six of the responding principals (6.2%) indicate that a formal decision making process is used to make decisions.

Parental Involvement

Several themes emerged regarding parental involvement on SBM councils. Five principals suggest that SBM councils slows the decision making process. Twenty-five of the 96 respondents (26.0%) indicate that the areas in which councils are able to make decisions are limited.

Lack of parental knowledge regarding school law, policies, and procedures were evident in the open ended responses. Twenty-six surveys (27.1%) suggest that parents on councils do not have adequate background in school law, policies or procedures. In addition, the text analysis shows that it is difficult to get parents to serve on councils. Twenty-three principals (24.0%) mention difficulties regarding their success in recruiting the appropriate number of parents to serve on council.

Parental attendance at meetings was also mentioned as an issue. Thirteen principals (13.5%) indicate that parental attendance at council meetings was irregular. The attendance issue may be caused by scheduling conflicts. Seventeen principals suggested difficulty in scheduling meetings. The problem here is one of finding a meeting time that is convenient both to staff and to working parents.

Several principals expressed concern regarding personal agendas of parents; parents on councils sometimes push for decisions based on personal issues or feelings. Twelve surveys (12.5%) contained responses regarding the personal agendas of parents serving on council.

Despite these concerns, many of the principals suggested that is was important to have parents involved in the decision making process. Some principals suggest that having parents involved is needed in order to gain support for the school; others indicate that the involvement of parents can help to increase parents awareness of the needs of the school. Text analysis of open ended questions shows that 33 (34.4%) of the 96 respondents indicate that parental involvement on school SBM councils has benefit for the school.

Minority Representation

Few written responses regarding the involvement of minority parents on school council could be found in the text generated by the open ended questions. Five principals (5.2%) made reference specifically to minority parents on SBM councils. The responses involving minority parents revolved around two issues: difficulty in securing minority participation on SBM councils and irregular attendance of minority parents on council.

Conclusions and Implications

The theoretical framework for this study was based on open systems theory. The premise behind open systems theory is that all organizations must be open to the environment in order to function effectively (Andrews, 1987; Morgan, 1986; Scott, 1981). Following open systems theory, the school must consider the wider environment of which it is a part (Andrews, 1987). Parental participation in the decision making process helps schools receive input from the wider environment, thereby making schools better able to adapt to changes in the larger environment (Goodlad, 1987; Scott 1981).

The ability to adapt to the larger environment becomes more critical as the environment grows more diverse (Scott, 1981). Parental involvement in school governance is one way to help the open systems school adapt to a larger environment that is becoming more diverse culturally and ethnically (Drucker, 1994; Fullan, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1984). Many schools are adopting a shared governance approach; the data from the survey show that 116 of the 191 (60.7%) principals participating in the study indicate that parents are involved on school SBM councils. Results from the 1993-94 School Staffing Survey used by Daugherty and Rossi (1996) showed that approximately 44.2% of the public schools in the United States used a site based

approach to decision making that involved parents in the governance process. The difference in the amount of schools reporting parental involvement in the two studies may have involved wording of the two surveys. The School Staffing Survey used by Daugherty and Rossi (1996) asked is a site-based management council existed at the site. This study asked participants if a site based management council or some other building level council existed that involved parents in the decision making process. Even though these figures are somewhat different, it is clear that parental involvement on building level decision making councils is a common strategy employed by schools to receive input from the external environment.

Schools and organizations that are open must form bridges to the wider environment. This is particularly true in times of declining resources or increasing environmental diversity (Andrews, 1987). Open systems also develop strategies that protect the organization from ambiguities in the larger environment. While schools and other organizations create bridging strategies that help to increase interdependence with the wider environment, they also must develop buffering strategies that help protect the technical core from the instabilities engendered by growing diversity. The results of this study can be viewed from the perspective of bridging and buffering strategies that are used by open systems (Ogawa, 1996). Open systems theory refers to these strategies as boundary spanning and boundary maintenance strategies.

Bridging and Buffering Strategies

A large number of public schools in the United States do involve parents in the decision making process. This bridging strategy is evident in 60.7% of the schools participating in this study and in 44.2% of the schools participating in the larger School and Staffing Survey (Daugherty & Rossi, 1996). Bridging strategies help schools create the diversity needed to deal

effectively with a diverse environment. Scott (1981) refers to the law of limited variety. According to Scott (1981) a system "will exhibit no more variety than the variety to which it has been exposed in its environment" (p. 83). Parental involvement on school SBM councils is a bridging strategy that helps schools create the diversity needed to effectively deal with a diverse environment.

The bridging strategy of including parents on SBM councils allows the schools to access information from the parents that are served by the schools. According to open systems theory, the open model stresses the reciprocal ties that bind the organization with the larger environment. One of the critical inputs from the larger environment is information (Scott, 1981). Inclusion of parents on SBM councils is one method of receiving information from parents and other community members.

The data from this study indicate that SBM councils are able to involve parents in decisions regarding instructional issues. Data analysis shows that 98.3% of the 116 schools having parental involvement on SBM councils make decisions regarding instructional issues; this mirrors the results of the School and Staffing Survey (Daugherty & Rossi, 1996) which found that 85% of SBM councils involving parents made decisions regarding curricular and instructional issues. Clearly, these schools use a bridging strategy to involve parents in the decision making process in the areas of curriculum and budget.

School decision making councils are also able to involve parents in decisions regarding budget issues. Data from this study indicate that 80.2% of the 116 schools having parental involvement on SBM councils make decisions regarding budget issues. This bridging trend was also seen in the School Staffing Survey where the data revealed that 66% of the schools with

parental involvement on SBM councils assisted the principal in decisions regarding budget issues. Once again, schools seem to use a bridging strategy to involve parents in decisions about building-level budgets.

While the results from this study indicate that schools employ bridging strategies that enable parents to influence decisions regarding the curriculum and the building budget, the same schools also use buffering strategies that limit the amount of influence parents have in decision making (Ogawa, 1996).

One of the buffering strategies is seen in the type if SBM council employed by the the schools reporting parental involvement on council. Three types of SBM councils were identified by Wohlstetter and Odden (1992): principal control, administrative decentralization and community control. Out of the 111 valid responses to the questions regarding the type of SBM model used in the participant's school, 51 (45.9%) indicate that their schools follow the principal control model. According to Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) these councils are characterized by the principal having the final decision making power.

The second type of council defined by Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) are those where the decision making power lies with the certified staff. The study reveals that 32.4% of the 111 SBM councils marked as "valid" fall under this definition. In both the principal control and the administrative decentralization councils, professionals are able to buffer parental involvement by overriding input from parents. Eighty-seven of the 111 principals (78.4%) indicate that although their schools did have SBM councils that involved parents in the decision making process, parental influence on these councils is limited either by the principal having the final say (principal control councils) or by having a majority of certified staff members

(administrative decentralization councils). Clearly, parental power on these 87 councils is reduced. Only nine of the schools in this study (8.1%) operate under the community control model. In the community control model, the final decision making authority rests with parents and community members.

It is interesting to note the 15 (13.5%) followed a SBM model not identified by Wohlstetter and Odden (1992). These councils were designed to have equal numbers of parents and staff members. Principals did not have the final say in the decision making process. The council membership and the lack of a principal override in decision making could be seen as a bridging strategy. The buffering strategies in place on this new type of council is not clear. Further study is needed in order to determine if the amount of power devolved to parents differs on the three models offered by Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) and the additional model found in this study.

Parental involvement in decision making can be of benefit to the schools (Schlecty, 1990). Such involvement can increase parental support of school programs and activities and serve to increase the sense of ownership staff and parents have regarding the school and it's activities (Rosenholtz, 1985). This sense of ownership can help student achievement and increase administrative coordination of school wide instructional programs (Rosenholtz, 1985). Thirty-three principals (34.4%) responding to the open ended questions in the survey indicate that it is critical for parents to be involved in the decision making process. Eight of the 33 principals indicate that parental involvement in decision making serves to increase parental support of school programs. Education leaders are aware of the critical nature of parental support. Successful schools build on the support of parents.

Both comparative and longitudinal studies of shared governance are needed to refine our understanding of how site based decision making is influenced by bridging and buffering strategies used by schools as open organizations. This study relied solely on the perception of the principal regarding parental involvement on SBM councils. A national study that focuses on the perceptions of parents serving on council may provide some insight to parental involvement in the decision making process. Additional studies are also needed to help explore the perceptions of certified staff regarding the involvement of parents in the decision making process.

Further research is also needed in conflict resolution strategies. Although schools participating in the study only reported moderate levels of conflict, 12.5% of the participants responding to the open ended questions report frustration with parents who pressed their own agendas. Buffering strategies of professional override and limited parental involvement in decision making may help limit conflict by reducing parental input. Conflict will occur and left unchecked, is unhealthy for schools (Carpenter and Kennedy, 1988). Studies specifically targeting successful conflict resolution strategies used by councils may provide valuable information to educational leaders.

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